

FORZA VITALE!

January 12, 2012



More than Just Singing: Reflections on the Sanford Jones MTIPS Workshop

By Rochelle Holmberg

During the summer of 2011, I had the privilege of attending the Summer Institute at the Montessori Teachers Institute for Professional Studies in Northbrook, Illinois. Sanford Jones started off the weeklong institute with a 2-day music workshop organized by the six elements of music: rhythm, pitch, timbre, intensity (dynamics), form, and culture. His presentation was further organized by the ways a young child can experience each of these elements: listening to music, moving and dancing, using one's voice, using percussion instruments, and using music notation.

The music-listening activities, dances, songs, rhythm games, composition lessons, and tidbits of wisdom (both musical and non-musical) are too numerous to list. Of all that he shared, perhaps the most inspiring suggestions dealt with ways to augment the singing that takes place each day in the classroom.

Model the use of and appreciation for notated music. When seated with a group of children awaiting a new or familiar song, have the sheet music with you. Show the children where the notes are on the page, explaining that they let us know what pitches and rhythms to sing. Also show where the lyrics are found on the page. The children are delighted when I say, "Wasn't it nice of Mr. Jones to notate the music and lyrics to Sunflower? I don't think we will ever forget this song."

Walk or march while singing. This can be done in several ways:

- Step with each syllable of a song, letting children know that they are walking to the rhythmic pattern of the music.
- Step with each beat. This is achieved by walking at a steady pace, in-time for the duration of the song.
- Step to the meter of the music. This is very similar to stepping with each beat. However, only step on the strong beats (usually every other or every third beat).
- Walk to the phrasing. With a partner, walk towards one another during the first phrase of a song and away from one another during the second. Repeat this movement for following

phrases.

Act out a familiar song. Sing a phrase of a song, and decide with the children if there is something that could be acted out. Figure out if there are characters in the song and if so, what are they doing? Perhaps some children will need to stand in as animals, or pose as objects. Go phrase by phrase before putting the entire song together with the actions.

Set the pitch before singing a song. Before singing a song with the children, know what pitch it begins on. Either invite a child who knows the pitch names of the bells to ring that particular bell or show any child what bell is to be rung, giving the pitch name. It is amazing how quickly children begin to remember the initial pitches of songs when this practice becomes habit.

Explore and name dynamics. Sing a soft, quiet song. Ask the children to describe how loud the song was. Explain that when they sing, they can use the word *piano* to describe quiet music. The same exercise can be done for a loud song, using the word *forte*. This same type of exercise can be used to elicit creative descriptions of music and to explore other musical terms that describe a particular style or intensity.

Help children use their natural (and lovely) singing voices. Demonstrate and practice singing while standing with good posture. To encourage singing that is strong, have children face the window while singing so they are able to “sing through the window”. To help that strong singing be pleasant to listen to, remind them that it is the breath that makes the voice. Of course, listening to a recording of a children’s choir with your students can be very inspiring.

Compose short songs. With the children, choose a part of a familiar poem or decide on a phrase to use for the song. Determine the rhythm of the poem by holding hands with a child and swinging your arms to the rhythm of the poem so that the child can feel it. Notate the rhythm with the moveable notes that are used with the bells. Keeping the rhythm the same, move the notes to the staff board, placing notes on lines or spaces so that a nice melody might result. Play the composed melody with the bells, sing along, and adjust as necessary.

While singing has always been a lovely activity to share with a group of children, putting these activities and techniques into practice with the children has brought a new energy to singing in the classroom.



About Rochelle Holmberg: Rochelle is currently a Primary Guide at Montessori Children's House. She received her AMI primary diploma in 2005. In her spare time, she plays violin and sews.

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FORZA VITALE!

April, 2012



Walking In

As at most Montessori schools, the staff at Montessori Children's House share ideas about children and parenting with our parents. Periodically we attach a short article to our weekly Newsnotes. This is one that I wrote shortly after our school opened and noticed most parents carrying their child from car to school—and in some cases from a nearby apartment building to the school. OMA members are welcome to use it any way you wish—borrowing, re-printing, re-writing, etc. Or let me know if you have a different approach.

David Cannon, Montessori Children's House, Portland



I'll admit it: I still cringe a bit when a phone call begins, "I'm looking for a nice place to drop my child when I go back to work....." But it does remind me of the happy fact that you are not "dropping" your children here!

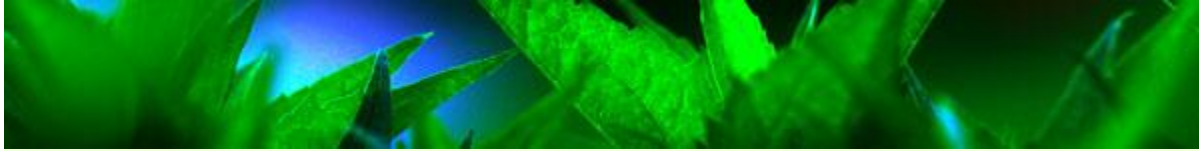
One day last spring after I took our granddaughter to her toddler class at Cedar Montessori School, a new parent there started a conversation like this: "I love seeing these little tiny children walking themselves up to the door along with their mom or dad, carrying their own lunch bag. It's so different from the other daycare we used before where most of the kids were carried from the car to the door hurriedly as if they couldn't walk."

I recalled this the other day watching a couple of our toddlers walking in (and down the long hallway, in the case of the Heron Cove children). I thought I'd share a few thoughts after years of observing at schools for young children.

First, I am *not* arguing for you to stop carrying your child down the sidewalk or through the door if that's your practice. I don't presume to know enough to do that. This might be a rare moment of physical closeness in a busy morning of preparations followed by a long day at work. I'd be the last person to ask you to give that up in order to have that particular exercise of independence for your toddler. You have plenty of other opportunities to develop independence.

FORZA VITALE!

Feb-March, 2012



Lewis and Clark Montessori Charter School

By Melissa Harbert

Several years ago a group of parents who were dedicated to Montessori education for their own children wondered about next steps in education as their children were graduating from Children's House programs in the East Multnomah County area. What also bound the group together was the lack of the means to afford private tuition, or the ability to transport to distant private elementary Montessori classrooms. The foundations of LCMCS were born, and, with much research, lots of hard work, and assistance from local Montessorians and public school educators, their vision of providing students with a viable and authentic Montessori charter school were brought to fruition. Gresham-Barlow School District accepted the charter school proposal and agreed to act as the school's sponsoring district. A board was formed, non-profit status procured from the State of Oregon, and the school had its operational beginnings. A hard scramble ensued for facilities, staffing, and procuring materials. Much assistance in these efforts was provided by David Cannon, and the school owes a tip of its hat to the many hours of consultation he put in, as well as to many other of our colleagues. LCMCS opened its doors in September, 2008, with a Kindergarten and two lower elementary classrooms, with 82 students ages 5-7 years.

Much was learned in that first year, especially about the particular needs of a Montessori program. The board aimed to hire a Montessori-trained administrator to take the school onward, and I joined the school in July of 2009, moving back to Oregon after nearly 10 years in New Mexico.

Since then, we have grown quite a bit: the school has added classrooms and age levels, so that now LCMCS serves ages 5 through 12 in the charter school, with a fee-based Children's House for 3-6 year olds and plans for adding an adolescent program in the fall of 2013. The school numbers just under 200 students this year, and made a move to beautiful Damascus, just 4 miles south of Gresham, partnering with the Gresham-Barlow School District for facilities. Come out and observe our lovely school!

Here's a few more bits of information to help answer some frequently asked questions about what "charter school" means, the fit of "public +Montessori" in a program, and more:

- *Just what is a charter school?* Oregon law provides for publicly-funded schools with educational delivery methods that are significantly different from the conventional methods to operate as alternative educational settings. The charter school may be sponsored by an established school district, or by the Oregon Department of Education. The charter school then has responsibility to report on student progress, financial management, and operations to the sponsor to ensure effective use of public funds.
- *How are charter schools funded?* When I tell colleagues that I am the head of a charter school, they often sigh and say something like “it must be nice to not have to worry about where operation funds are coming from – with it just coming from the state.” I chuckle and say “Wrong!” Charter schools operate on 80% of the funds from the state that their district cousins do, and then districts also receive federal dollars for transportation, Title programs, and much else that charter schools are not eligible for. This all translates to... our charter school receives for each student just about half of what the average private school tuition in our area is. And, when funds get slim, we can’t raise tuition to make up the gap. Our school does not receive administrative or other operational assistance from the school district, either. We just learn to do a lot with a lot less, I reckon!
- *Does a charter school have to take marching orders from the school district?* Not really, though there are stipulated requirements in our charter contract with the district. We undergo thorough audits both in finances and in operations and program by independent professionals, and report the results to our district. We must provide for Child-Find and follow special education regulations, but then, so do private schools in many ways, by federal law. The students in grades 3 and up must take the Oregon standardized tests each year, but many private Montessori schools also elect to do so. Our enrollment is by lottery, which makes for a fair process and diverse population. There are fewer spots at the upper grades to fill as time goes on, as our attrition rate is very low, so most of our entering students come in as young children. We are an independent 501 (c) (3) non-profit with our own board of directors. The school has its own strategic planning process, and conducts its own business. We have formed a positive relationship with our sponsoring district, and there is mutual benefit in that.
- *So how does the school practice authentic Montessori in a public setting?* We feel very fortunate that our district supports the school in conducting true Montessori practices, as the district board and administration want their charter schools to be quality alternatives. Board and administration members have also expressed that they want to see what this model looks like, observe its possibilities and strengths, and they know that if that becomes too dilute or if too many extraneous requirements are placed on the program, the true nature of Montessori education may be compromised. Our staff is all fully Montessori-trained, with over 50 years of experience between them! Most are also Oregon licensed teachers. Classrooms have full sets of materials, are well-furnished, and the school is led by an experienced Montessori-trained administrator. So I guess the short answer is: the same way all quality programs do it – by solid theoretical foundations expressed through best Montessori practices! You are welcome to visit and observe.



About Melissa Harbert: Melissa is the Head of School at Lewis and Clark Montessori Charter School. She has been a Montessori educator for nearly 35 years, having earned her AMI Primary Diploma in 1980. She was a teacher for more than 12 years and a head of school for the past 14 years. She is active in the “Educateurs sans Frontieres” initiative to develop global programs to serve the underserved using Montessori methods.

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But I do think the child walking under her own power into her school in the morning is a meaningful and positive thing for those who do it.

Our job is to share perspectives with parents so that they have the most possible options and ideas to consider. Many of us have benefited along the way from the perspectives of others that in some cases led us to try something new. Here are just a couple of things you might want to consider:

- ***Movement.*** It's absolutely the case with children (and to a lesser extent all of us) that when we move, when we use our muscles large or small as part of anything we do, it engages our minds and our hearts much more fully. That's been well established by research on early learning, and many of us can relate to it intuitively as well. It's one of the reasons that "learning by doing" is such a key principle of Montessori and of other successful teaching techniques. The principle applies more broadly than just learning situations, however. If a child walks into a place under his own power—be it the preschool, the zoo, the grandparents' house, or anywhere else—he begins there more connected to whatever it is. It isn't hard to imagine that very young children walking themselves to the preschool even five or ten yards are getting mentally prepared to greet, to prepare, to do what they do here. Consider providing that opportunity by your example and gentle encouragement; and of course the days when your child isn't quite sure if he is ready to engage, he'll show you by asking to be carried on that occasion, which is great. No routine needs to be for always!
- ***Independence.*** Yes, Montessorians and parenting books talk about it a lot, and sometimes parents understandably react and say "Enough already! They're so young, and they've got many years ahead when they can be independent and will have to be. I treasure the baby and toddler years."

We would say that it's all a matter of degree. Of course your child has fewer arenas for independence now than she will next year and fewer then than the year after. But it is important to recognize that since the moment of birth a child is "programmed" to move in the direction of greater independence all the time, that this is the essence of human development, and that it's the art of child rearing and nurturing to provide the "roots and wings" in a balance that's optimal for your child. Security and safety are fundamental—psychological as well as physical—but that's only half the equation. The other half is to move out and up, to find one's own self, to do things for one self—to look outward, to walk, feed oneself, to reach, crawl, explore, and to begin doing the most important things in the world—the things you see adults doing. They must be terribly important, the child's unconscious mind reasons, because the adults are doing them!

Studies in recent years have only confirmed the belief that meaningful self-esteem develops from meaningful accomplishment, at every stage of life. Children who are permitted to do things for themselves (and taught to) are generally happier, sunnier, and more active. They learn the most and tend to go through life seeking and meeting challenges well. Older children and adults who can function independently and competently have the best foundation for functioning cooperatively and socially. I know these are huge generalizations, but it so important to those of us who have had the chance to observe this for decades that we have a hard time not sharing it with friends, and it encourages us when we see these correlations confirmed and shared ever more widely in our society. We at the Montessori Children's House will not only share these views, but we'll be happy to point to other sources of information on the subject to those who are interested in pursuing it.

That walk from car to classroom is just one little moment and not of universal importance by itself. You may be encouraging independence appropriate for your child's age in hundreds of ways, and this may be the time you choose to carry her or him as you did when they were smaller, a very sweet moment for both of you. (Some parents carry a child to the bedroom at night for the same reason after a day of activity and "independence" for both of you.) I just hope that if and when your children walk here or start doing

anything else like that for themselves, you will get the same pleasure from seeing it and appreciate it like those of us here whose work is so much about helping children to help themselves.



About David Cannon: David Cannon taught in the elementary Montessori classroom for eight years and was a school administrator for 20 years. He has recently opened a new school in the South Waterfront neighborhood. Montessori Children's House serves toddlers and primary-aged children. Also, he works part-time as a consultant in public affairs and education, and has several volunteer jobs. In addition to serving as Treasurer of the OMA Board, David has volunteered on the MINW Board, three Montessori school boards, and as a city planning commissioner.

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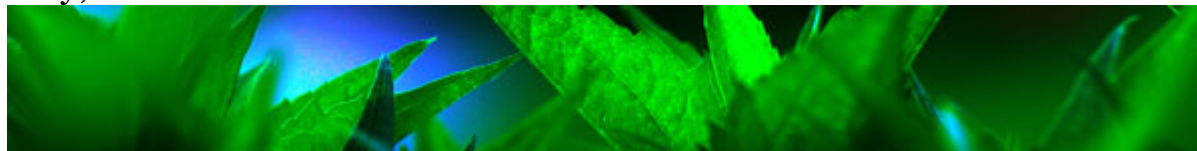
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FORZA VITALE!

May, 2012



Every Child Should Have a Relationship with a Tree...

Reflections on Elise Huneke-Stone's talk about Biology

By Jennifer Ryznar

In November of 2011, Elise Huneke-Stone shared a story with us at the Montessori Institute Northwest. She told of early humans and how language was built around their interactions with plants and animals, and how our ancestors could all be considered to have been biologists. Her talk still resonates with me. After attending with other local Montessorians, I rushed home to amend the home environment for our children. I placed a clipboard with sketching supplies near the back door, positioned a stool at the base of a tree I thought they may happen to climb, and generally showered my two first-plane children with stories about trees and nature. "shall we make a drawing or start a collection or read under this tree and gaze through its winter-bare branches?" As you can imagine, my near-frantic flurry of interest came from a genuine place – Elise's charge that all children get outside – often – and build relationship with a tree.

While I cannot create a connection with nature for my children, even with trees conveniently located in our backyard, I can take to heart as a parent and a guide how important our connections with nature are – and how perfectly plants and animals inspire children – to communicate, to observe, to meet the needs of their human tendencies. From the history of early language in humans to current brain research in cognitive development, plants and animals have meaning in our lives. And, our connections with them stretch back to the beginnings of human civilization. I can trust that with a prepared environment and well-placed (well-paced) stories, the many children who pass through our classroom doors will forge bonds and write their own stories about trees.



About Jennifer Ryznar: Jennifer is the Executive Director for the Oregon Montessori Association. She received her Primary AMI diploma from Joen Bettmann at the Ohio Montessori Training Institute in 1998. She completed AMI Elementary training in 2002, with Kay Baker and Greg McDonald at the Washington Montessori Institute. Jennifer taught at the primary and elementary levels in Juneau, Alaska, where she enjoyed guiding many of the same children from age 2 through lower